New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1947

Volume VIII, Number 13 • Rachel W. Coffin, *Editor* • Week of September 8, 1947

1947 PRODUCTIONS

Premieres in Other Years

Original Reviews Appeared in These Volumes

1946 Vol.

Stage Play	*Page*
Androcles and the Lion	217
*Annie Get Your Gun	382
Another Part of the Forest	247
Beggar's Holiday	204
*Born Yesterday	466
*Burlesque	208
*Call Me Mister	403
Christopher Blake	233
Cyrano de Bergerac	321
Fatal Weakness (The)	251
*Happy Birthday	280
Henry VIII	271
Iceman Cometh (The)	315
Joan of Lorraine	255
John Gabriel Borkman	263
Lady Windermere's Fan	307
Lovely Me	211
Made In Heaven	292
O Mistress Mine	474
Park Avenue	275
Playboy of the Western World (The)	287
Pound on Demand	217
Present Laughter	283
Show Boat	496
Temper the Wind	197
Toplitzky of Notre Dame	201
What Every Woman Knows	268
Wonderful Journey	214
Years Ago	229

1945 Vol.

Carousel	226
Red Mill (The)	141
*State of the Union	102

1944 Vol.

*Harvey	95

1943 Vol.

*Oklahoma	341
*Voice of the Turtle (The)	199

1940 Vol.

Life With Father	457

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of September 8, 1947*

1947 PRODUCTIONS

Premieres During 1947

Reviews Appear in This Volume

Stage Play	*Page*
Alice in Wonderland	398
*All My Sons	475
As You Like It	451
Barefoot Boy With Cheek	402
Bathsheba	415
Big Two (The)	494
*Brigadoon	427
Chocolate Soldier (The)	431
Craig's Wife	457
Eagle Has Two Heads (The)	421
*Finian's Rainbow	486
Hamlet	447
Heads or Tails	377
Importance of Being Earnest (The)	439
It Takes Two	469
*John Loves Mary	465
King Lear	453
Laura	353
Little A	483
Louisiana Lady	362
Love for Love	367
Love Goes to Press	497
*Magic Touch (The)	348
*Medium (The)	379
Merchant of Venice (The)	450
Message for Margaret	393
Miracle in the Mountains	387
Open House	359
Parlor Story	436
Portrait in Black	371
Pulitzer Award	376
Story of Mary Surratt (The)	461
Street Scene	490
*Sweethearts	479
*Telephone (The)	379
Tenting Tonight	406
Volpone	448
Whole World Over (The)	411
Yellow Jack	443
*Young Man's Fancy (A)	383
Critics' Circle Award	392

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of September 8, 1947*

THEATRE OPENINGS

"The Magic Touch"

Theatre Critics Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN — NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS — NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK MIRROR — NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
NEW YORK SUN — NEW YORK POST — NEW YORK TIMES

All Reviews reproduced by permission.

Yearly Subscription $25.00

Published by CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS, INC., 235 East 22nd Street, New York 10, N. Y.

"The Magic Touch"

Daily Mirror

SEPTEMBER 4, 1947

'The Magic Touch' Doesn't Have It

By ROBERT COLEMAN

The theatrical season of 1947-48 got away to an inauspicious start last night at the International Theatre, where John Morris Chanin presented a farcical bore titled, "The Magic Touch," something its authors, Charles Raddock and Charles Sherman, lack.

Three acts were consumed in telling an inept story of the trials and triumph of Cathy and Jeff Turner. It all started when Jeff, a shipping clerk at $28.50 in a publishing house, invited his boss to dinner, the better to hit him up for a raise.

The Turners let the boss get the idea they were living happily on $28.50, so he decided to publish a book about them. The truth was they were spending more. Keeping that fact from the public, the invasion of Cathy's former admirers who'd read about her straightened circumstances and threats by a tough money lender helped pad out the anemic script.

In the end, as if you didn't know, the Turners were on the way to making a fortune from the book, and their consciences seemed okay, though they were hoodwinking the public. Unscrupulous brats, those conniving Turners.

Raddock and Sherman sought to satirize a woman documentary photographer via one of their characters. They were doomed to failure from the start, because their model is funnier than anything they were able to put upon the stage.

Producer Chanin evidently got his dates shuffled. Here it is the beginning of September and he starts serving turkey.

'THE MAGIC TOUCH.'

Comedy by Charles Raddock and Charles Sherman; staged by Herman Rotsten; settings by Louis Kennell; presented by John Morris Chanin at the International Theater Wednesday evening, September 3, 1947. The cast:

Cathy Turner ..... Sara Anderson
Jeff Turner ..... William Terry
Eddie Mitchell ..... Sid Melton
J. L. Thompson ..... Howard Smith
Amy Thompson ..... Frances Comstock
Baker ..... Le Roi Operti
Flossie Claypool ..... Hope Emerson
Ken White ..... Burke McHugh
Larry Masters ..... Carleton Carpenter
Wilbur Grisby ..... Norman Tokar
Barron ..... Richard Karlan
Phil Parks ..... Henry Lascoe

Synopsis: The entire action of the play takes place today, in the modest little New York apartment of the Turners. Act. I. Early autumn. Dinner hour. Act. II. Several weeks later. Afternoon. Act. III. An afternoon of the following month.

NEW YORK **Herald Tribune**

SEPTEMBER 4, 1947

By HOWARD BARNES

The Touch Is Missing

THE theater's summer siesta has been rudely interrupted at the International. "The Magic Touch," which has come to Columbus Circle, is as bumbling a bit of make-believe as has ever ushered in a new season. Whatever dramatic sorcery it inspires is contrived with a baseball bat rather than a wand. Charles Raddock and Charles Sherman have gathered together a lot of dramatic oddments and remainders and pretended that they constituted a comedy. Several willing workers in the company virtually knock themselves out trying to get a chuckle out of the material. There are vagrant hints that the action has had the benefit of direction, but little if any of it deserved any ministrations whatsoever.

• • •

The comical core of the play is the notion that a young couple has a hard time making both ends meet these days. Since the youngsters are neither destitute nor unhappy, it takes a lot of farcical cross-stitching on the part of the authors to keep their plight even vaguely appealing through the course of three acts. There is considerable to-do about a book on budgeting which the husband's boss decides will be a best-seller. There are random monkey-shines as some of the wife's ex-suitors arrive from Dayton, laden with porterhouse steaks. When these various devices fail, as they constantly do, the principals take to whimsy with the most embarrassing results.

• • •

All the fun that is to be found in "The Magic Touch" comes from fugitive bits of clowning. Howard Smith, as the publisher, gives the piece farcical accents by the sheer emphasis of a pompous portrayal. Frances Comstock has a certain pleasant assurance in the part of the big-wig's wife, although the script is forever leaving her in the lurch. Sid Melton, as the roughneck friend of the young married folk, wisely pays no attention to any possible dramatic continuity that might be discovered in the production, relying on pantomine for random laughs. As for Hope Emerson and Le Roi Operti, as a pair of odd characters, they stick to the scenery-chewing school of acting.

• • •

The struggling husband and wife are played by William Terry and Sara Anderson. The latter has much the better time of it. At least she is easy to look at. "The Magic Touch" is not a hopeful augury for the oncoming bustle behind footlights. It is one of those dramatic compositions which makes one wonder why it ever reached a stage. Some one should have read the script before so much effort was wasted on a piece of tripe.

New York Post

SEPTEMBER 4, 1947

Drama Season Opens With a Dull Thud

By RICHARD WATTS JR.

Cooler heads nearly prevailed at the International Theatre last night, and the play called "The Magic Touch," which was scheduled to start the new season, almost didn't open. It seems that some financial problem came up and the manager of the house was reported to have asked for additional cash before he would let the show go on. I wouldn't bore you with these sordid economic details, save that the story has such a tragic ending. For the melancholy upshot was that the curtain finally did go up on "The Magic Touch."

This was where the mistake came in, since the little disaster by Charles Raddock and Charles Sherman, who may have been foolish enough to give their right names, is terrible beyond words. In a rash moment, this reviewer once wrote that even such atrocities as "Heads or Tails" or "Open House," horrible as they were, took on a certain amusing nostalgic glow with the passing of years and, in a decade or so, became treasured memories of the hardier playgoers. Now I must take it all back. If I lived for a hundred years I would never have amusing memories of "The Magic Touch."

Apparently this new mishap was written by two men filled with a bitter hatred of book publishers. At least, its central character is a publisher, who thinks it is a wonderful idea to get out a best-seller showing how a young couple can live on $28 a week, and thereupon forces an unhappy wage slave of his and the victim's wife to give the volume verisimilitude by living on just that budget. In some manner or other a comic spiritualist, a woman photographer, a plain-clothes man, a thug, and three young men from Dayton get into the plot.

Hapless Actors

At one point a character remarks bitterly: "If this is your idea of a joke, it's a very poor one." I thought the actor got real feeling into that speech. Such a forceful player as Howard Smith, who was the brightest feature of "Dear Ruth," such a pleasant and personable ingenue as Sara Anderson, and such amiable performers as William Terry, Sid Melton and Frances Comstock are immersed in the proceedings, and you can't blame them if they are a little unhappy about things.

It is sometimes said that such minor messes as "The Magic Touch" at least do no harm. I'm not so sure. There was present last night a drama critic from South Africa, who has been making a five-month tour through America. He was filled with enthusiasm and excitement about what he had seen and he was particularly impressed by the vitality of our theatre, even in such outposts of progress as the states of Texas and Washington. As the climax to his trip, just before returning to his native land, he had dreamt of seeing a Broadway first night. What he saw was the premiere of "The Magic Touch." I'm afraid it changed his entire conception of the United States and its drama.

The New York Times

SEPTEMBER 4, 1947

THE PLAY

No. 1

By BROOKS ATKINSON

From now on, the Broadway season is going to improve. For "The Magic Touch," which turned on the lights at the International last evening, begins at the foot of the class. It says here in small type in the program that it is a comedy, and that Charles Raddock and Charles Sherman acknowledge having written it. Nothing has been so ineptly written or staged on Broadway since last season, which seems like only yesterday. There were giants in those days. Do you remember "Heads or Tails," "Tenting Tonight" and "The Bees and the Flowers"—all of them candidates for oblivion?

"The Magic Touch" is an anxiously comic sequence about a young couple who try to live on $28.50 a week and become the uneasy heroes of a book on that subject, promoted by a buccaneering publisher. It is written in many styles, the most intolerable being whimsey. Under Mr. Rotsten's banal direction, it is acted very poorly indeed. Let's not go into that except to say that Sid Melton makes something recognizably human out of a small part and that Sara Anderson as the muddled heroine plays agreeably when the script does not call for what might be referred to delicately as caprice.

* * *

During the festivities your correspondent heard only two notable comments, both by women. "Into each life some pain must fall," said one who was struggling into the aisle after the first act. The lady in front, who looked very angry, nudged her husband into leaving before the first act; but, lo, they were both back for the second. Not for long, however. Uttering an illegal oath, she inquired bitterly: "Do we have to take any more of this?" No, they didn't have to. They departed. But that's not the last he is going to hear about "The Magic Touch," which incautiously opened a new season of love on Broadway.

The Sun

SEPTEMBER 4, 1947

'The Magic Touch,' Which Is Pretty Awful, Starts a New Theatrical Season.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

Well, here we are in the new theatrical season of 1947-48. The festivities began last night. The sun-tanned reviewers, back from beach and hilltop, were in their accustomed places. Ira Katzenberg, bronzed as a Cherokee, sat in Row AA. There were actors on the stage, and scenery, too. But no play.

"The Magic Touch," fashioned by Charles Raddock and Charles Sherman and put on at the International, is no cause for jubilation, and it should not bring on any indignation. It's just a hapless and hopeless little transient, a dull and childish concoction, that doesn't belong on any stage. There must be a thousand wandering play scripts, unproduced and unwanted, that would have been more deserving of John Morris Chanin's time and money.

This "Magic Touch" is all about a young man and his bride trying to live, in these days of soaring prices, on $28.50 a week, and of the ruction that comes about when the publisher for whom the husband works decides that there's a book in the situation. Nothing can stop him until he brings it out. And, like the covered carpet tacks in "Get Rich Quick Wallingford," it pays off.

It's somewhat embarrassing to find an actor of Howard Smith's ability in a play so utterly inept. He plays the publisher. Sara Anderson, who is the young wife, is a competent ingenue. Most of the others just come and go, moving about as directed and speaking lines written for them.

In other years, and upon the island of Manhattan, seasons began with such projects as "Mamzelle Champagne," "Apartment 12-K" and "Elmer Gantry." They weren't much, but they were masterpieces compared with "The Magic Touch."

So let's pretend that this first one doesn't count. There will be other evenings and other plays. They will be better. None can be worse. "The Magic Touch" is pretty awful.

Journal American

SEPTEMBER 4, 1947

Dubious Comedy Exposed to Public

By ROBERT GARLAND

Having produced and reproduced "The Magic Touch" for weeks in secret, John Morris Chanin at long last has exposed the Charles Raddock-Charles Sherman comedy to the public gaze.

The exposure occurred last night at the International Theatre, where a curious congregation disintegrated along with a curious play.

Mr. Chanin has been doing nicely behind closed doors with Mr. Raddock's and Mr. Sherman's curio. Benefits (whatever they really may be) have been the order of the evening and the folding money in the International's till has been like green pastures to the producer's good right eye.

Just why John Morris Chanin decided that Wednesday, Sept. 3, was the night on which to let the public in must remain one of the minor mysteries of the business known as "show."

For, upon exposure, "The Magic Touch"—as play or performance—has nothing to damn with faint praise or to praise with faint damns.

It just isn't there!

An Idea Dawns

Maybe you'd like to know what all the spouting's for up Columbus Circle way. Upright and alert all evening, I've a dim idea. But I do know that Jeff and Cathy Turner have been married and are living, as the saying is, in their (and I quote) modest little New York apartment (unquote) which is as big as the International's stage.

Weary of making the most of Jeff's modest pourboire — it's $28.50 a week—the Turners decide to invite the boss, a publisher studying to be a halfwit, and his wife, a vulgarian with a hat by Lily Dache, to dinner and, over a mess of home stewed chicken giblets, ask J. L. Thompson for a raise.

The Turners almost get it! But, with success knocking on their modest little New York apartment's door, the boss changes his "yes" to "no" and decides to bring out a book entitled "The Happy Turners" or "How To Live on $28.50 a week and love it." After that, things go from worse to the bottom of the barrel.

Show business has no business there.

Less Families

Although familiar players, such as Howard Smith, he of Judge Wilkins in "Dear Ruth," Frances Comstock, she, of the North Carolina Jonesea, and Le Roy Operti, he, whose grandfather composed the music for the original "Black Crook," are on stage at the International, less familiar players act away with the misdemeanor.

Sid Melton, when not standing-in for Michael Todd, knows what the character called Eddie Mitchell has on his mind. Carleton Carpenter could do more with Larry Masters if the playwrights provided material. The Krasne Canned Food Products put up a bright cylindrical front.

So, if John Morris Chanin still has faith in his good right eye, he'll forget about last night's at-long-last opening and return "The Magic Touch" to its secret showings. Behind closed doors, the piece is where it should be. Exposed to public gaze, its magic isn't magical, its touch is difficult to bear...

The new season is still unopened.